

If the Image Fits . . .

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In another of those haircut cases which crop up from time to time, the Civil Service Commission the other day ordered the FBI to reinstate a fingerprint clerk who had been twice suspended, then fired, for refusing to trim his collar-length hair.

What set this incident apart was the FBI's rationale for sticking to shorthair standards. The bureau argued that the average American compares FBI agents "in his mind's eye" to "Inspector Erskine (played by Efrem Zimbalist Jr.) or Special Agent Colby of 'The FBI,' a popular television program," and that letting the real-life agents' hair down could cause "a lessening of public confidence in the FBI."

Well, now. First there was the G-man image cultivated by the late J. Edgar Hoover. Then, eight years ago, Inspector Erskine hit the airwaves as the network G-man. Now that living-color image—

no more than second cousin to fact—has been cited as the living ideal. It is as breathtaking a mirror trick as requiring all defense attorneys to look like Raymond Burr, or all presidents like Raymond Massey.

Actually, "The FBI" is not a mirror of the FBI. One top television scriptwriter, David W. Rintels, pointed out to a Senate subcommittee last winter that the program's agents never tackle civil rights or anti-trust cases, never shoot to kill, never bug a house, tap a phone or hire an informant—things that real-life agents do. The bureau's new acting director L. Patrick Gray III, has even refurbished the dress codes so that FBI men may wear colored shirts and slightly longer hair. So far, such changes have not caused any dramatic lessening of public confidence in the real FBI. Perhaps Inspector Erskine's image is the one that needs a change.